

TAKE THIS ISSUE HOME!

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8)

SPRING 2018

VETERANS Health MATTERS

INSIDE:

Diagnosing & Preventing Cancer

*Award Winning Wellness Magazine for **VISN 8** Veterans
in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico & the U.S. Virgin Islands*



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Veterans Health Matters is a quarterly health and wellness magazine for Veterans produced by the VISN 8 Office of Communication. VISN 8 is the country's largest network of VA hospitals and clinics serving Veterans in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. Your feedback is welcome. If you'd like to comment on the content, please e-mail or write to:

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To Our Readers



There is much important research being done to better understand how genes affect our health. VA is conducting a national, voluntary program to add to this research. To date, more than 550,000 Veterans have played an important role by providing genetic and health information that may lead to better treatments for all Veterans. To learn more, read page 3.

Cancer is one of the most serious diseases we may face during our lifetime. Fortunately, cancer treatment can be very successful when detected early. On page 3, get empowered with knowledge about breast, lung, and colorectal cancer, including recommended screening tests for early detection and prevention.

It's well known being tobacco-free is the best way to prevent lung cancer. However, some tobacco users have started using e-cigarettes to help quit. Read the latest research findings about their health effects on page 6.

Finally, have some springtime fun by testing your seasonal allergy knowledge and your "gnome-sighting" skills on page 7.

Be well!

Miguel H. LaPuz, MD, MBA
Network Director, VISN 8

Orlando to Host 2018 Veterans Wheelchair Games

More than 500 Veterans with disabilities will meet in Orlando July 30 to August 4 to compete in the world's largest annual wheelchair sporting event.



Veterans will compete in 17 events, including air guns, archery, basketball, bowling, handcycling, motorized wheelchair rally, nine ball, power soccer, quad rugby, softball, swimming, table tennis, track and field, and weightlifting.

The 38th National Veterans Wheelchair Games is being hosted by the Orlando VA Medical Center and Paralyzed Veterans of America, in partnership with the City of Orlando, Orange County, and Central Florida Sports Commission. This is the third time the event will be held in Florida; Miami hosted in 1991 and Tampa in 2013.

Wheelchair sports promote rehabilitation and wellness through rigorous sports competition. For many newly injured Veterans, this may be their first exposure to wheelchair sports. They will be able to learn from experienced and elite-level wheelchair athletes.

For more information, including volunteer opportunities, visit www.wheelchairgames.org.

Million Veteran Program: What's In It for Me?

What is the Million Veteran Program (MVP)?

MVP is a national, voluntary research program conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Research & Development. This research collects genetic and health information to help lead to new ways of preventing and treating illness. To date, well over 550,000 Veterans have enrolled in the program. The goal of MVP is to provide a better understanding of how genes affect health and illness. This will ultimately improve health care for all Veterans.

What are genes and how do they affect health?

Genes are pieces of biological material that determine our traits, like the color of our eyes, our height, and other personal features. By interacting with our environment and lifestyle factors, genes may also affect our risk for disease, including heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. In fact, genes may be a critical part of why some people get diseases, and others do not.

How does this important research help Veterans?

Veterans, and all Americans, will benefit greatly as we learn more about how genes affect our health. Screening, diagnosis, and treatments for some illnesses, including certain cancers, have already improved through greater knowledge about the effects of certain genes. In time, MVP should lead to better treatments and preventive measures for many diseases.



How do I participate in MVP?

Any Veteran enrolled in VA healthcare can participate. MVP is rolling out at many VA facilities, including several in Florida. If you use VA healthcare at an enrolled site, you should receive a letter inviting you to volunteer in MVP. If you haven't received a letter, call 1-866-441-6075, or go to your local MVP clinic to participate. MVP studies take only about 20 minutes to complete. To locate your nearest MVP clinic, visit www.research.va.gov/mvp/all-clinics.cfm#map.



What does participation involve?

You have a very important role to play. Active participation in this program includes:

- Filling out surveys about health and health-related behaviors
- Providing a blood sample (containing DNA and other substances) to store for future gene analyses at a VA facility
- Allowing secure access to VA and VA-linked medical and health information, including past and future health records
- Agreeing to future contact

For more information about MVP visit www.research.va.gov/mvp.

Diagnosing & Preventing Cancer

Thinking about cancer can be scary. But, as with most challenges in life, the more we know, the better we can face it. First, you can reduce your risk for many cancers by having a healthy lifestyle: eating wisely, staying active, not smoking, and limiting alcohol. It's also important to keep up with recommended screenings for certain cancers. This means looking for cancer before any signs or symptoms appear. When found early, treatment is much more successful. Read on to learn more about three of the most common cancers among Veterans.

Lung Cancer

An estimated 1 in 15 men and 1 in 17 women will develop lung cancer during their life.

An estimated 224,000 men and 206,000 women live with lung cancer.

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths for both men and women by far. Cigarette smoking is the number one cause of lung cancer.



SYMPTOMS: Most types of lung cancer don't have symptoms until they spread, but some appear in early stages, such as a cough or respiratory infection that doesn't go away, coughing up blood, hoarseness, shortness of breath, and chest pain when taking deep breaths.

DIAGNOSIS: Imaging tests (e.g., X-rays, MRIs, etc.) look for signs of cancer. A biopsy of lung tissue is tested for the final diagnosis.

TREATMENT: Depending on the extent of cancer, treatment may include a combination of chemotherapy, radiation therapy, surgery, and immunotherapy (stimulates the immune system to destroy cancer cells).

VA RECOMMENDED SCREENING*:

Ages 55-80: If smoked one pack a day for 30 years and are still smoking or quit less than 15 years ago, screening with a low dose Computed Tomography (CT) scan. Learn more at www.prevention.va.gov and search "lung cancer screening."



Watch the Video!

You can also watch a video of "Diagnosing & Preventing Cancer" at www.visn8.va.gov/VISN8/news/publications.asp.

Breast Cancer

An estimated 1 in 8 women will develop breast cancer during their life.

An estimated 3.3 million women and 33,000 men are living with breast cancer.

It starts when breast cells grow out of control and form a tumor.

SYMPTOMS: Often, there are none, but if present, the most common one is finding a new lump. Others include swelling, skin irritation, and breast or nipple pain.

DIAGNOSIS: Tests include mammograms, ultrasounds, and MRIs. If needed, a biopsy tissue sample is also tested for cancer.

TREATMENT: Surgery is often done to remove the cancerous tumor. Additional therapies may include radiation, chemotherapy and other medicines, and hormone therapy.

VA RECOMMENDED SCREENING FOR WOMEN*:

Ages under 40: May be recommended for high risk women.

Ages 40-44: May start having an annual mammogram.

Ages 45-54: Mammogram every year.

Ages 55-74: Mammogram every 1-2 years.

Ages 75+: Recommended for some (talk with your provider).



Colorectal Cancer

3rd most common cancer in both men and women.

An estimated 711,000 men and 606,000 women are living with colorectal cancer.

This cancer usually starts as a growth or polyp on the inner lining of the colon or rectum and takes several years to develop into cancer.

SYMPTOMS: Early colorectal cancer often has no symptoms but when present, include rectal bleeding, blood in the stool, change in bowel habits (e.g., diarrhea, constipation or narrowing of the stool), and cramping or belly pain.

DIAGNOSIS: Tests have different risks, benefits, and recommended frequency. VA options include stool-based tests, direct colon tests such as a colonoscopy (flexible scope placed in colon), or CT colonography (CT scan looking at the colon). Talk with your provider about the right test for you based on your medical risk and family history.

TREATMENT: A combination of therapies is used depending on the extent of the cancer. This includes surgery, chemotherapy and other medicines, radiation, and immunotherapy.

VA RECOMMENDED SCREENING*:

Ages under 50: May be recommended if high risk. Discuss with your provider.

Ages 50-75: Generally recommended. The test method is based on your medical risk, family history, and personal preference.

Ages 76-85: Recommended for some. Discuss with your provider.

Ages 85+: Generally not recommended.

**Source: www.prevention.va.gov with modifications provided by Dr. Chona Macalindong, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, VISN 8. Recommendations are for those with "average risk." Discuss your risk level with your provider.*

Ready to Quit Smoking?

Visit www.smokefree.gov, www.betobaccofree.hhs.gov, and www.tobaccofreeflorida.com to learn how quitting improves your short- and long-term health.

Get Help From VA

As you take this huge step in improving your health (and your life!), VA is there for you.

Veterans enrolled in VA health care have access to the following:

- Medication and counseling
- VA's smoking quitline: 1-855-QUIT VET (1-855-784-8838)
- Stay Quit Coach, a mobile app that provides readily available support and information if you are already in treatment to quit smoking, and to help you stay quit after treatment ends. It's available for Android and iOS (Apple) devices at www.mobile.va.gov/appstore/veterans.
- Text messages from SmokefreeVet to help you stay motivated. Visit www.smokefree.gov/veterans.



Talk to your VA provider or Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) to customize a quit strategy for you.

Not enrolled in VA health care?

Find out if you're eligible: www.va.gov/healthbenefits

Get the Facts on E-Cigarettes



What are E-cigarettes?

Some tobacco users have started using e-cigarettes, also called vaporizers or "vape pens," to help them quit smoking. These devices come in all shapes and sizes. Some e-cigarettes resemble regular cigarettes, cigars, or pipes, while others look more like a pen or a thumb drive (portable digital storage tool). Most forms have a battery, a heating element, and a place to hold a liquid. Once heated, they produce an aerosol containing nicotine (found in regular cigarettes), flavorings, and other chemicals.

Health Effects

In general, the aerosol in e-cigarettes contains fewer harmful chemicals than smoke from tobacco products. But, the contents are still considered unsafe:

- Nicotine, a highly addictive chemical that can also harm pregnant women and their developing fetuses, as well as an adolescent's developing brain

- Known carcinogens (cancer-causing chemicals)
- Small particles that travel deep into the lungs
- Toxic heavy metals, such as lead

Also, before e-cigarette liquid burns and vaporizes, it can be poisonous, if swallowed, breathed, or absorbed through the eyes or skin. Another harmful effect of using e-cigarettes occurs when young people go on to smoke cigarettes or chew tobacco, which they are likely to do if they now vape.

Can they help?

Research has not shown that using e-cigarettes will help you quit using tobacco. In fact, most adults who try vaping to help them quit continue to use both tobacco and e-cigarettes. To quit tobacco for good, the most effective methods include nicotine replacement therapy and behavior-change programs.

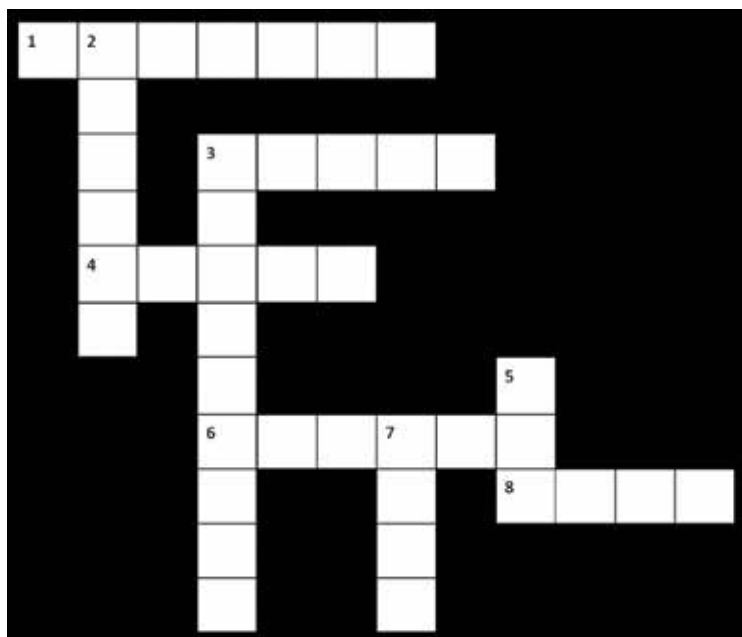
'Find the Gnomes' Fun Activity

How many of these garden gnomes can you find 'hiding' in this issue of Veterans Health Matters? Hint: there could be some waiting to be found in the illustrations. Answer below.



Seasonal Allergy Crossword

Answers are below.



ACROSS:

- 1 Eye lids may be ____.
- 3 When you ____, you should cover your mouth.
- 4 When you have a ____ nose, you should grab a tissue.
- 6 You may get a sudden urge to ____.
- 8 The kind of circles that appear under your eyes.

DOWN:

- 2 Your eyes feel like someone turned on the shower.
- 3 You may feel "stuffed up" or ____.
- 5 The whites of your eyes can turn this color.
- 7 Your nose and ____ feel itchy.

ANSWERS
ACROSS: 1 - Swollen; 3 - Cough; 4 - Runny; 6 - Sneeze; 8 - Dark
DOWN: 2 - Watery; 3 - Congested; 5 - Red; 7 - Eyes
There are 9 hidden gnomes.



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To receive a printed copy of Veterans Health Matters through the U.S. mail or sent directly to your email account, just let us know and we'll add you to the mailing list. Ways to reach us are as follows:

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1. Complete this form with the Veteran's full name and current mailing address.
2. Cut out the form and insert in a stamped envelope.
3. Mail to:

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c/o VISN 8 - VHM
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Farmington Hills, MI 48334

(Please print)

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Last Name

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Be sure to include the above information.

By Phone:

(800) 345-2476 – press 5 for English or press 6 for Spanish





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MVP Needs You!

The Million Veteran Program is VA's voluntary research program that collects genetic and health information to help prevent and treat illness. Veterans can help by participating. Learn more at www.research.va.gov/mvp.

VA Sunshine Healthcare Network

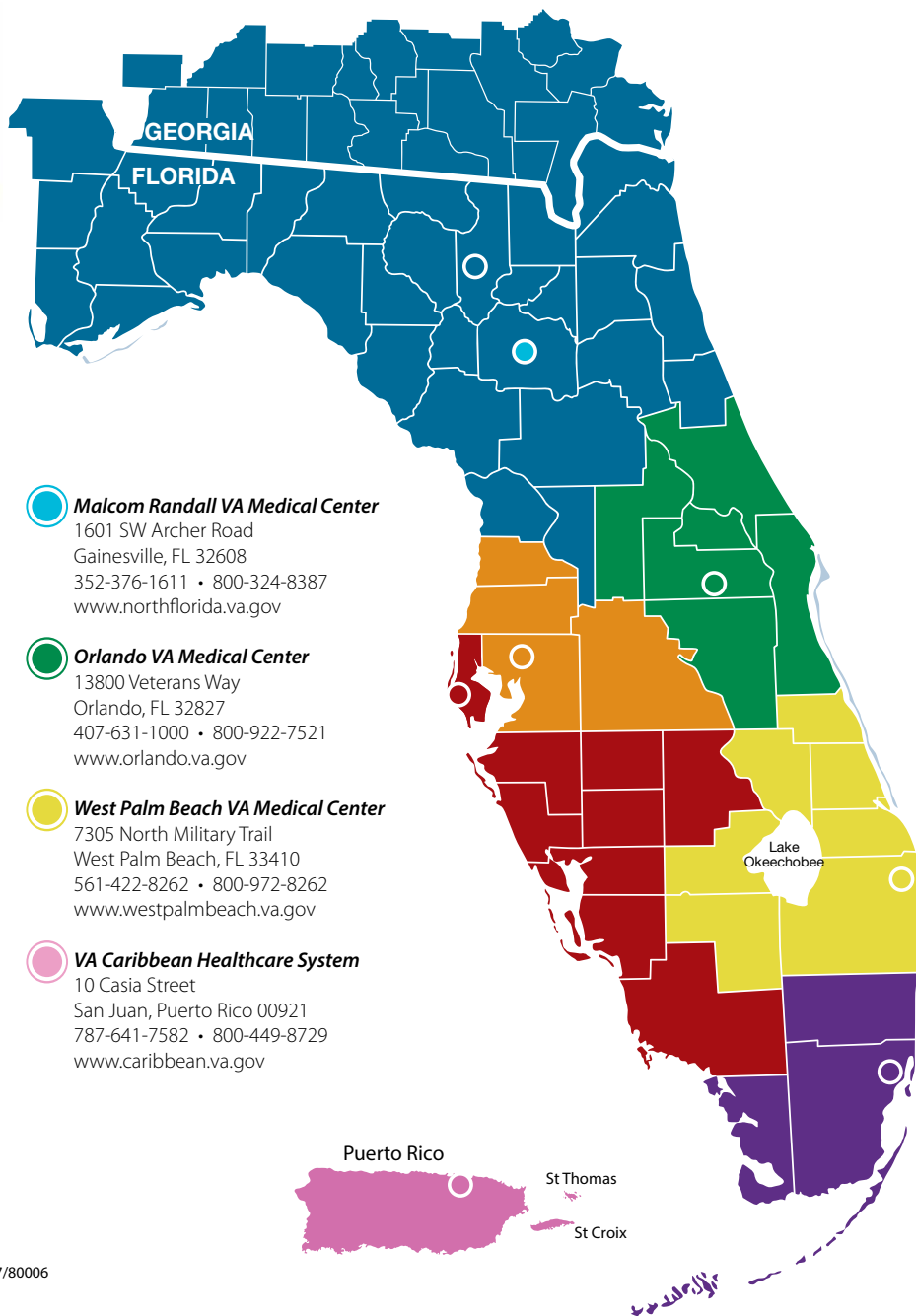
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